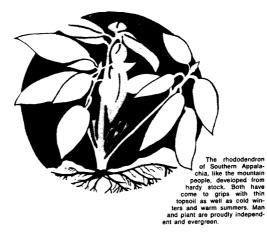
"... A RIGHT GOOD PEOPLE"

Harold Warren



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"...a right good people"

By HAROLD F. WARREN

Appalachian Consortium Press BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA 28607



The Appalachian Consortium was a non-profit educational organization composed of institutions and agencies located in Southern Appalachia. From 1973 to 2004, its members published pioneering works in Appalachian studies documenting the history and cultural heritage of the region. The Appalachian Consortium Press was the first publisher devoted solely to the region and many of the works it published remain seminal in the field to this day.

With funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities through the Humanities Open Book Program, Appalachian State University has published new paperback and open access digital editions of works from the Appalachian Consortium Press.

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PREFACE

HAROLD WARREN

"....a right good people." The simple phrase, a snatch of quote from an Appalachian mountain man's description of himself and his neighbors, burned indelibly into my memory more than three years ago.

The mental flame ignited like a flash of spontaneous combustion, because it was one of those rare moments when the setting, character and context blend to yield sudden insight and special meaning. The phrase, of course, is not as simple as it might appear at first glance.

That golden summer morning, driving slowly through a lush Tennessee mountain valley and watching people scurrying about chores, it was easy to imagine oneself as a sort of Appalachian Walt Whitman, hearing Appalachia singing. Green leaves were still jewelled with dew. The whole mountainscape seemed to glow in the early light, as if sprinkled with the iridescent dust of crushed butterfly wings.

One figure in particular stopped my eye, a figure bent from decades of hard work and humility. He was hustling around his log barn, feeding his cows and mules. "Well, set down and rest yer bones," he said in greeting, as if it were late evening. His craggy face creased into a friendly grin. He pushed the comfortable old felt hat back on his head, then warmed his strong hands in the pockets of his overalls.

We talked about an hour, meandering among a couple dozen topics of mountain life and lore. Finally there was a brief, silent reverie, an aimless moment of simply enjoying the morning and the camaraderie. Then he squinted toward the butter-vellow, eight o'clock sun and said with measured consideration:

"Well, these are a right good people. Yessir, a right good people."

The words and the tone were loaded with subtle nuances of meaning, reflecting both quiet pride and proper modesty. There was strength, yet gentleness. Brittle judgement, yet mellow feelings. A strong sense of community, yet an equally strong sense of independence.

".... a right good people." The phrase has a ring to it, a feeling of genuineness about it, that characterizes a broad cross-section of the people of the Southern Appalachians. This book, I hope, represents such a cross-section. The collection of true stories here often echo folkways and values from another era, but they are not intended as an indulgence in nostalgia for its own sake. These people are caught in the web of the present.

Most of the material here originally was gathered for *The Charlotte Observer*, the largest newspaper in the Carolinas, for features and columns during more than four years. Some material is added from previously unused notes and memory, and some is rewritten. The sampling selected for this book is a fair representation of all the dozens of stories I've written from Appalachia. I greatly appreciate the permission granted me by the *Observer* to use these materials.

I also owe gratitude to the man who first suggested the idea of putting together this book, F. Borden Mace, director of the Appalachian Consortium's "Traditions of Southern Appalachia In Transition" project, as well as to Dr. Cratis Williams, dean of the graduate school of Appalachian State University, and to Loyal Jones, director of the Appalachian Center at Berea College.

Harold F. Warren March, 1974



FOREWORD

LOYAL JONES

Those who look at Southern Appalachia usually find whatever they are conditioned to find. Beauty or ugliness, promise or failure are to an extent in the eyes of the beholders. Legions of investigators have come to the mountains in the last decade to observe, expose film or video-tape, write about us, or consult with those who conceive programs to uplift us. Most who came saw primarily the poverty, the ugliness, and the hopelessness. No one would deny that these are there, even though some observers found also beauty and integrity and joy in living. Bascom Lamar Lunsford (who appears in this book) put it this way in describing film makers he had assisted: "They had their own low notion about it . . . Why, we give 'em the best in the world, [and] they selected the worst."

Most of those who interpreted us and our region did so with the best of intentions. They were com-

passionate, dedicated, and action-oriented, mostly liberals who were humanistically or religiously motivated. They wanted to tell an unsuspecting America about colonial holdings, pockets of poverty, cycles, syndromes, degradation, squalor, despair, and hunger. There was much that America needed to know, especially if it were to support a war on poverty and related progressiveness. And the media did their work well. Few areas were unexamined. Appalachian books, articles, television documentaries, films and tapes became abundant, changing Appalachia in the public mind from a place to a condition. Inadvertently we Appalachians were to some extent dehumanized in this process. Many of us read and viewed the products of the media with stomachs turning. Many of our young denied their origins. Appalachia came to represent something awful in American life. One famous movie's plot depended on a belief in the utter degradation and perversity of Appalachians, and to help make this point, a retarded boy, a deformed child, and a century-old woman were displayed. The point, of course, is that persons have been used as means toward ends. Some of the ends, unlike the above-mentioned movie, were good. But that does not excuse the artistic or social crime of robbing persons of dignity.

A few have viewed Appalachia differently. They have seen beauty and strength and other less easily described attributes. They are mostly poets, folklorists, and novelists, some of them natives. Several newspaper men and women have also found that the Appalachians offered a rich resource of very human people who contrast sharply with the majority of what we call mainstream people.

Harold Warren is one such person. He looks at Appalachia and her people as a reporter but also as an accepting and tolerant native. He sees nobility amidst adversity, knowing that nobility can come only in adversity. He sees beauty in the simple things that cannot be quantified. He sees humor in the earthiness and incongruities of Appalachian life. He sees pathos and a quiet sadness in the slipping away of the old skills and traditions. His is a loving view of his fellow Appalachians and their ways. The poverty, the problems, and the struggle are there, and he sees it all, but perhaps because he is an Appalachian, he is more interested in persons and their qualities than he is in the inanimate or the abstract. He has a mountain politeness too that stays him from embarrassing those who have invited him in to share their lives for a spell.

So, here is yet another book about Appalachia, but I believe it is one of a limited number that will win the approval of native mountain people.

Loyal Jones, Director Appalachian Center, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky 40403 February, 1974



Selections from

The Appalachian Photographs
of Doris Ulmann

DORIS ULMANN

These photographs are selections from the Ulmann archives at Berea College, Berea, Kentucky. They were taken during the 1920's and 1930's by Miss Doris Ulmann, a remarkable lady from New York's Park Avenue who traveled the back roads and paths of Appalachia with a bulky glassplate view camera, a chauffeur, and a full complement of designer dresses.

The wonder is that she bridged so readily the gap between her world and theirs and left us with such straightforward portraits. There is, in these photographs, no condescension for the harshness of her subjects' lives, but rather an appreciation of mountain people for the uniqueness of their faces. "Faces," she said, "that bear the marks of having lived intensely."



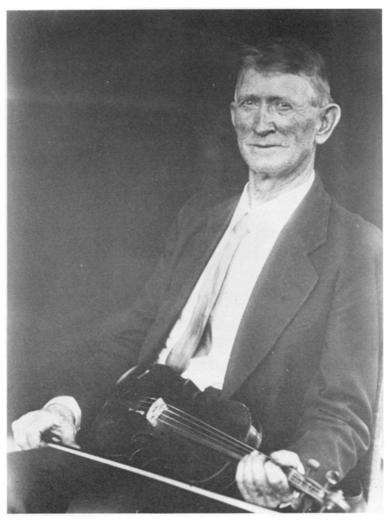
BY PERMISSION OF THE DORIS ULMANN FOUNDATION AND BEREA COLLEGE

Aunt Lou Kitchen (weaver), Shooting Creek, North Carolina



BY PERMISSION OF THE DORIS ULMANN FOUNDATION AND BEREA COLLEGE

Mrs. Abraham Lincoln Green (Aunt Serena), Brasstown, North Carolina



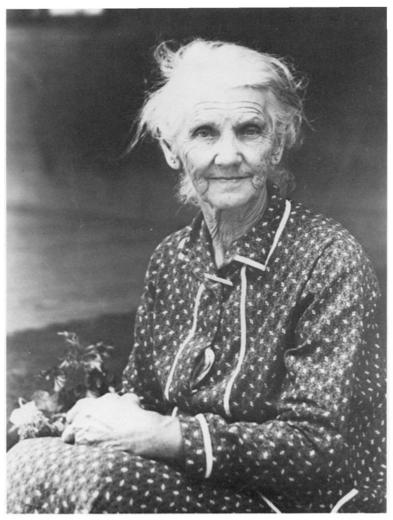
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Mr. Bryant, Brasstown, North Carolina

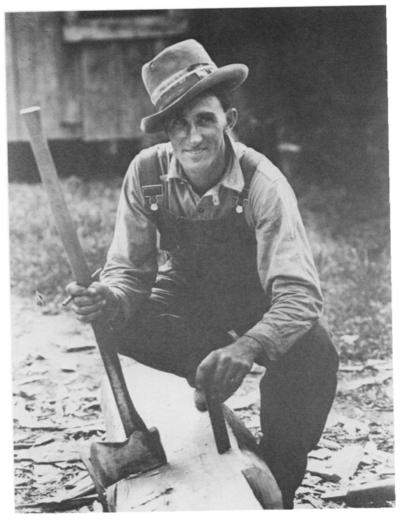


BY PERMISSION OF THE DORIS ULMANN FOUNDATION AND BEREA COLLEGE

Mr. Covey Odom (tanner), Luther, Tennessee



BY PERMISSION OF THE DORIS ULMANN FOUNDATION AND BEREA COLLEGE $\it Miss~Mannie~Coffman,~Russelville,~Tennessee$



BY PERMISSION OF THE DORIS ULMANN FOUNDATION AND BEREA COLLEGE

Mr. Stewart (cross-tie maker), Brasstown, North Carolina



BY PERMISSION OF THE DORIS ULMANN FOUNDATION AND BEREA COLLEGE

Virginia Howard, Brasstown, North Carolina



BY PERMISSION OF THE DORIS ULMANN FOUNDATION AND BEREA COLLEGE

Unknown



Selections from the photographs of Warren Brunner

WARREN BRUNNER

Warren Brunner is a free-lance photographer from Berea, Kentucky, who understands the very special relationship between the Appalachian man and the land he loves. His photographs capture the haunting, poetic quality of the mountain landscape and the sturdiness of its people. Just looking at a Brunner photograph can help to redefine one's sense of place.

Warren Brunner's photographs can be found throughout Southern Appalachia, and one-man shows are becoming increasingly popular. Representative works can be examined at Berea College and at Appalachian State University.



Resting from plowing. Barry Bowles, Madison County, Kentucky

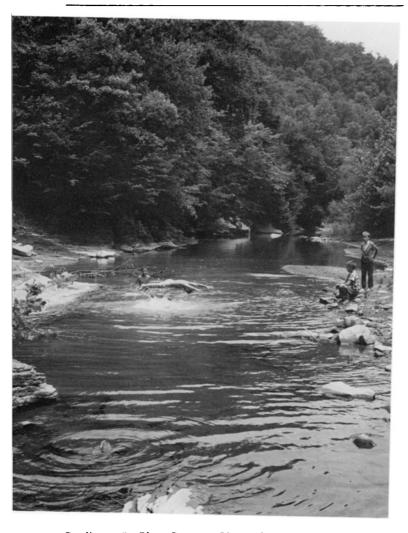


Spring plowing. The Barry Bowles farm





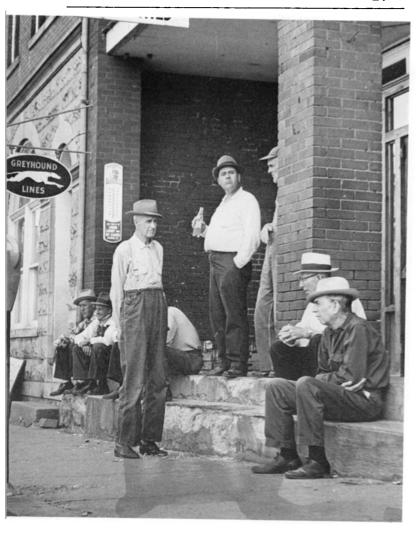
(top) Making sorghum. Madison County, Kentucky (bottom) A school in Jackson County, Kentucky



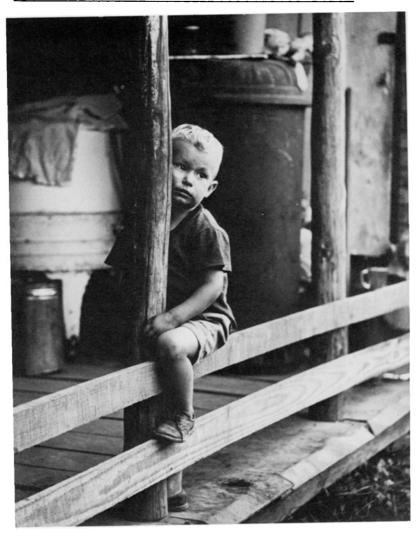
Cooling off. Clay County, Kentucky



Sunday afternoon on the front porch. Earl Thomas and his mother, Disputanta, Kentucky



Saturday afternoon in Rock Castle, Kentucky



Nobody to play with

"...a right good people"

BASCOM LAMAR LUNSFORD: THE SQUIRE OF SOUTH TURKEY CREEK

Rarely does a single interview produce so rich a tapestry of a man's life, work, knowledge and personality. It was the muggy evening of August 1, 1969. The author, tape recorder in hand, found Bascom Lamar Lunsford in high spirits backstage at the Asheville Civic Auditorium. The two sat and talked nearly an hour and a half as the recorder whirred. Literally hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles have been written about Lunsford, so most of the outward facts of his life and achievements are a matter of record. The following story, then, does not recount such well-known, glittering episodes as his entertaining British royalty and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Rather, it focuses on his personality, colorful speech, and keen interpretations of mountain lore, and the sampling of pithy quotes here are extracted directly from the tape. Because of the sense of immediacy in the tape, the story appears here exactly as it originally was written in 1969 for The Charlotte Observer. It is dedicated to the fond memory of the Squire of South Turkey Creek, who died at age 91 on Tuesday, September 4, 1973.

They call him the Squire of South Turkey Creek, The Minstrel of the Appalachians, The Grand Old Man of American Folklore and Music.

Bascom Lamar Lunsford's quick, clear, bluish eyes have watched 87 summers cloak the mountains he loves with greenery and wildflowers. That is a long time, long enough for a stroke to take its toll on his slight body, long enough to stiffen the sinews and slow the jaunty legs.

Yet not nearly long enough to dim the electric wit and the twinkling humor, the prodigious memory and keen analytical faculties, the forceful character and gentle voice.

The old man was sitting just off-stage in the city auditorium in Asheville, basking in the familiar warmth of old friends and new well-wishers and absorbing the nostalgic sounds of fiddles and banjos tuning or practicing backstage in preparation for the second night of the 42nd Annual Mountain Dance and Folk Festival. The festival for purists was his brainchild, one recurring testament to his rich life.

He sat with pained legs across a chair, a resplendent patriarch in his white suit and black bow tie and well-worn red satin rose in one lapel, commenting gently but authoritatively on mountain life and lore and music and nearly everything else a flatlander might be interested in.

The famous folklorist chuckled softly and clapped a frail hand on one thigh at the mention of his picturesque title, "the Squire of South Turkey

Creek," then leaned forward and confided with amusement and unblinking honesty that he perpetuated the image himself.

Tsk, tsk. He, who loathes sham so much that he refuses to pose in a "rough shirt" for pictures, does not live on South Turkey Creek, but in Asheville. Neither was he born by the Buncombe County creek, but in neighboring Madison County. Oh, he did build a roomy house on South Turkey Creek after he married Nellie Triplett in 1906.

He didn't rightly remember how "Squire" first got attached to it. But he got the basic idea many years ago, he said, from a political speech which "went over big with the home folks." His eyes sparkled with mischief.

"In connection with my work, I thought, I'd perpetuate it because it's folky, don't ye see? And true, y'see. I'd go to events in the big cities, and they'd be introducing fellers, so-and-so from New York, so-and-so from Chicago, y' know. So I'd tell 'em, 'just say, Bascom Lamar Lunsford from South Turkey Creek.' So I've purposely had that done.

"Well, it caught on. I've gotten cablegrams even, to South Turkey Creek." He chuckled impishly like a mischievous boy who had played an ingenious prank, his weathered face crinkling under the narrow brow and crew-cut silver hair.

"And I also put 'em to the inconvenience of using all my name instead of just Lunsford, don't y'see." He paused, his face turning serious.

"My life's work virtually got around to be that, don't y'see. It's purposeful. I realized that what I do-I want to call attention for the good it may do to the value of traditional culture as compared with the value of our culture.

"Now, they both influence the other. They come together, y'know. The feller that can write the best music or write the best literature is the feller that also knows something about the traditional background.

"The feller that knows the traditional background of his people has got the advantage over the feller that's got no idea 'cept something he's figgered out on his own, purely from an artistic standpoint, y'see. I've seen it done so many times."

He leaned back and recounted dramatic court cases and political feuds from the bygone days to illustrate his point. It was another area he knew well, because he studied law at old Trinity College, now Duke University.

"I've known that men and women dancing together with good music is the best type of entertainment there is. Men and women, mind you, not separate but together, of courting age especially.

"In the mountains the mountain man wants to get in and dance with his partner, in the park, where the caller is, y'see. Dancin' back in the coves and the places they havin' a barn-raisin', things of that kind. Well, a girl'll fix up with her best dress on to impress her sweetheart-courting has a whole lot to do with it-then there a boy puts a green lizard on his coat, of course, and comes out there and he wants to dance with his gal.

"That's what's behind folk music. That's it, don't ye see."

"And when you see 'em dancing around, y'know, with just a little swing of the shoulders, a twist of the shoulders, y'know, and the high notes of the fiddle comin' out keen, y'know, and then the thump-thump-thump of the banjo, y'know, and the feller can talk to his partner and not bother anything, y'know, and they can just keep a-goin' and a-goin' for ten or twelve minutes. Don't get tired, y'see. And the feller's enjoyin' himself and he don't know just exactly why."

Nearby, banjos plucked and fiddles wailed loudly, and the ancient man raised his voice slightly and gestured imperiously.

"I'm a great believer in the native worth of our own mountain people. They're wonderful. Wonderful people. The rural people of North Carolina are outstanding. I'm proud of 'em. The people here have integrity" His voice trailed off.

"When you go to a mountain home to hunt ballads of whatever, why, you go and take your hat off. The man of the house, although he may have nothin' but a cabbage patch around—it's his castle and all. It's where he lives.

"And his grandparents possibly could've been lords of the realm. And that's the way they feel about it.

"When I go to those places, off comes my hat. I don't say, 'Josie, get your banjo and play some, I want you to go to the festival.' I say, 'where's the gentleman of the house? Where's Mister So-And-So?' They say, 'he's at the barn.' I say, 'well, I wanta see him.'

"Well, they send and they say, 'go get your Pap." Then, when he comes in, I say, 'well, I tell you what I come for. I want your children to play some for me and I'm thinking' 'bout asking them to play at the festival. And I wanta hear 'em.'

" 'Well,' he says, 'I guess they can play awrightotherwise, he wouldn't let 'em play.'

"You ever think about that? That's a fact. You've got to begin where the authority is, y'know. And you got to show respect. And I'm glad they're that way."

A lady well-wisher stopped and patted him on the shoulder.

The old man, alert eyes amused, joshed, "You look like you're pickin' up a little weight. Does that make you mad?" She giggled and he bent forward in laughter.

"Last night, Mr. Bailey brought a lady back here and she said, 'member I danced with you at Bent Creek way back yonder, y'know, 'bout 1928? I said, 'you don't remember that, do you?'

"I said, 'why didn't we get married?' She said, 'we can yet, I'm not bound.' I says, 'but I am. See that woman over there?' I said, 'there's nothin' I can do about it now." The old man chuckled deeply, rubbed the high bridge of his nose, and gestured to his reddish-haired wife of eight years, Frieda.

His mind snatched up his earlier chain of thought, and he discussed the pride of the mountain man. Then, suddenly showing anger, he turned to an "educational movie" on Appalachian folklore.

"Yes, they came down, didn't want a staged thing, they said. 'Want you to take us where you've got this good mountain music, and we want to go all over the country, and' Well, they went down and they had their own low notion about it.

"I could've told them—I took 'em to the good places, I took 'em where the scenery was fine. I didn't stage it. I just did like they said.

"Wound out by them takin' pictures of old junk cars and stuff like that, that didn't belong to it, didn't help the picture and didn't help the folklore, don't y' see. I'm not satisfied with that program. Why, we give 'em the best in the world, they selected the worst."

He rocked back and flashed that restrained, impish grin.

"Scuse me for runnin' my mouth so much, but you see, I've got this chance once a year and if I don't take it nobody gonna take it for me." The grin broke open, and he touched your knee with a thin hand.

"You take the average citizen now. I bet you won't find a man that'll talk shop less than I will around home. I go off somewhere, y'know, I come

back and tell about somebody had some fat mules, or how the tobacco was, and so on.

"That movie, though-it's like, our country has been more systematically slandered than any country I know anything about. People come here to find a fine climate, waterfalls, green pastures and so on. Some log cabins, of course. People livin' here doin' pretty good. Take a notion to get a little work done, they'll send up the hollar to get a little help.

"And then, they'll have some children comin' along, and so on, and they'll start a little school. Outsiders 'll come in here and they'll write back to where they came from and say, 'won't you get ten minutes of your time to tell 'em about a school down here and these people, that the man does nothing but lay around and make liquor and the woman does all the work. And here's some ragged children that need help. Get us some old clothes." He mimicked.

"So that's done systematically, that same kinda treatment. So people that live away from here think nobody lives here but somebody that's shiftless and careless. So

"I'd rather live in a cabin and have nothin' but a cabbage patch. You're all right if you're taught to behave, taught discipline. Go play in the branch and make willow whistles, dress up clean and wash your face and go to Sunday School, and when Dad says to get up and go feed them mules, get up and feed 'em now, not after awhile. I say, that'll make a better citizen than a feller that drifts along and does not learn discipline.

"Now, we've had—and it's been that way since the beginning of our state—back down there, if a feller wanted a little more room, little more freedom, a feller marries and leaves, goes a little further west, and so on.

"Then each one makes fun of the other feller a little higher up the mountain. Clear on up 'til you get up there to where there's this old feller that lives on a mountaintop, got a big family up there. And they say, 'they're odd folks,' and they say this and they say that. And you go up there, they have more fun than anybody.

"And that's the way we are—we have more fun that anybody else." He chuckled again and looked out across the spotlighted stage.

"Now you take this festival here. It looks a little bit confused. Some people see folks runnin' around here on stage, y'know, thinks it's a disorganized thing. Well, we haven't had a printed program in 42 years, no use to start now. Point is, you couldn't go by it if you had it. At the same time, it's highly organized to be not organized. But it's a folk festival."

Fiddles on stage were zinging through "Wildwood Flower," and the old man smiled slightly.

Asked about the dulcimer, he shot back, "My opinion, while the dulcimer is a great instrument, an

old instrument, and so on-but I told some lady, 'you think if you get a dulcimer you're a folklorist right from the start.' She's written some very nice things about it. I told her my advice is to get a good dulcimer that's shaped well, kinda like a fiddle, made out of the right kinda wood and all, and put a ribbon on it and hang it on the wall. And then take down the old five-string banjo and go to makin' music. So in comparison with other music, the dulcimer has no place. It's hard to beat the old fiddle."

He squinted, his mind rummaging among stillsharp memories. "The real mountain music comes from places like Madison County (North Carolina). Up there, it's the richest county in the state in the older, traditional folk music. So happened I's born at Mars Hill and all, and I give Mars Hill College my collection of music and ballads and recordings that I've made from memory. And you'd be surprised to note that in this personal memory collection were about 700, which I recorded for the Library of Congress and Columbia University Library. They gave me transcriptions, don't y'see. Give 'em to Mars Hill for research work to perpetuate-well, after I'm gone, they can go there, and there they are.

"Lotta famous ballad collectors have reaped 'em in Madison County, got the cream of their collections there. The great collector, way back, Cecil Sharpe, went there. It's due to the fact that in Madison County the traditional ballads are better, and more genuine, more the real thing than any other place.

"I've been around there a lot. You'd also be surprised that a man 87 can recall verbatim just like I found them and who I found them, too, just from memory.

"There's so many good songs up there, it's hard to say which ones are the best. But you take the songs like 'Barbara Allen,' of course, 'Pretty Polly' and 'Sweet William and Lady Margaret,' passed down from memory pure for generations.

"The whole story of Barbara Allen is a wonderful thing. Sung in different ways and all, from the old Scotch on down. I'm interested in everything bein' genuine. That's a fine old song. I have a hundred different texts of it myself, I've collected.

"That's the purpose in my life. Back in '34, this National Folk Festival was organized in St. Louis, first year, and they asked me to come out there. I went and took a lotta dancers and ballad singers with me. And after that, for 12 years, I'd go a month ahead to Chicago, Dallas, Chattanooga, Washington, New York, Philadelphia, just to promote the thing. And then appeared on so many college and university programs, and so on. And the state fair for 20 years.

"I'd just present it like mountain people ought to. I wouldn't costume or anything. Present it, just genuine, like I am now. There's been a lotta things written, and I've had fun, but—well, now, it's something bigger than any one individual. It's the mountain people that play and dance.

41

"I wrote the letter of introduction that got Jimmy Rogers his first recording with Victor. I've been there in the beginning on a lot of things. Now there's so many names you can't keep up with them, but I've known nearly every feller that was interested in folk music.

"Now, you have to be careful. A lot of it is just a conglomeration, it's just a different thing. Used to hunt for original music. I'd go around to colleges and places and offer a five dollar gold piece for the best song when I'd travel.

"Now, I don't attempt anything that requires much responsibility, because not much certainty whether I'm gonna get to make it anyway, so I don't know, but I hope I'll be here next year. I want to put it off as long as I can. I've enjoyed every minute of my life. Nobody's had more fun than I have.

"Oh well, now I'll get on the program here a little bit. Get out there on stage and introduce some folks, put a little touch to it, y'know. What they expect of me. My old legs hurt, but I can do it for a little bit. If it's not hurting' them, why, I shouldn't worry for just a few minutes at a time.

"Well, I'm having a good time, y'know. I'm in a good humor. The wife, she'll testify I stay in a good humor practically all the time." His eyes twinkled.

His wife added, "He don't get sassy with me but just once in a great while."

"Oh, she gets called down then, y'know," he parried.



Bascom Lamar Lunsford, The Sage of Turkey Creek

"But now when he gets sassy, he's real sassy," she jousted back. He grinned and patted you gently on the knee as a plaintive ballad swelled and fell through the cavernous auditorium.

"Minstrel of the Appalachians," you called him.
"I like that," he answered. "It's a pretty good territory, the Appalachians, y'know. I'm very familiar with it, from Harpers Ferry to Iron Mountain in Alabama, all the way down.

"Spent the night in more cabins along that line than any other man I know of, different places, y'know."

Bascom Lamar Lunsford's blue eyes narrowed as he said it, as if he were remembering those cabins one by one, oblivious to the uproarious frolic all around him.

THE WINDS OF CHANGE MURMUR UP THE LITTLE LAUREL

Smiling, gray-haired Mrs. Ethel Carleton saw visitors coming up the other side of the gurgling creek, so she came out of her weather-browned house and shushed a yapping dog.

The old, plank-sided house was in a clearing accessible by a steep, primitive road twisting for miles into one of the most remote hollows of Watauga County, North Carolina. Visitors were scarce, and Mrs. Carleton beamed as they walked a sagging plank across the creek.

"Hey there. Y'uns come on in, make y'selves at home," she called. Her handshake was strong and genuine. Her husband, Lonnie, had gone off down the Little Laurel toward Triplett to "work logs," she said, and the teenaged girls, Betty Jo and Susie, were inside the four-room house.

"Well, people can go off to town life if they want, but I'm just as close to town as I want to go," Mrs. Carleton said matter-of-factly, settling in a rocker facing the Warm Morning oil heater. She had a face of strong character, with steady blue eyes and silvery strands of hair drawn back to a bun.

"Oh yeah, things are a-changin' right smart. As to me, I'd like to have a better road, things like that. But I think to go off to town, you get to too many people sometimes, y' know."

As remote as the Carleton farm is, now there is a large new housing development called Powder Horn Mountain only a few ridges away as the crow flies. The whole region is developing rapidly as a lure for city folks on vacation or in retirement. The economy and taxes are climbing. Transportation, education, communications, electricity and many other factors are having a strong impact on traditional lifestyles.

In subtle ways, the changes are beginning to touch the lives of even the most isolated mountain families like the Carletons. The hard-jawed independence and open-faced hospitality are still there. Mrs. Carleton's well-worn quilting frame still hangs from a bedroom ceiling. There are kerosene lamps on the mantel, three guns on the wall and a setting banty hen with four tiny chicks in a cardboard box in the living room.

But now there is a large picture-window in one side of the aged house, an electric stove in the kitchen, a red telephone by the door, a powerful transistor radio on the dining table.

Outside there are chickens and cows, beehives and ponds teeming with trout, outbuildings containing tools, meat, vegetables and fruits. But there also is a muddy four-wheel-drive-truck.

"No, I don't go to town only just when I have to—don't rightly recall when the last time was," Mrs. Carleton was saying as she poured cups of boiled coffee, rich and black and steaming. "Now, Lonnie 'll go maybe once a week. He's a business sort, y' know. He'll go atter just a box o' sody or somethin'.

"No, don't get out o' here to church. We try to live right here every day.

"People that go to town life, they have to get a job. And then they say, 'Well, I don't feel like it, but I gotta go to work or lose my job, so I gotta go.' That's one thing wonderful to live out. If you wanta take off a hour or two, you can.

"If I wanta work all the time, I do. And if I don't want to, I don't," Mrs. Carleton said. She went to the mantel, sprinkled Prince Albert tobacco into a cigarette paper, licked and rolled it, then returned to her rocker. She puffed contentedly, holding the cigarette between her right thumb and forefinger.

A few days earlier, Dr. Cratis William, dean of the graduate school at Appalachian State University in Boone, had touched on the same quality of old-time mountain life when he told a forum in Asheville that



The home of the Lonnie Carleton family, across the Little Laurel

this is one reason why people are leaving cities and coming to the mountains.

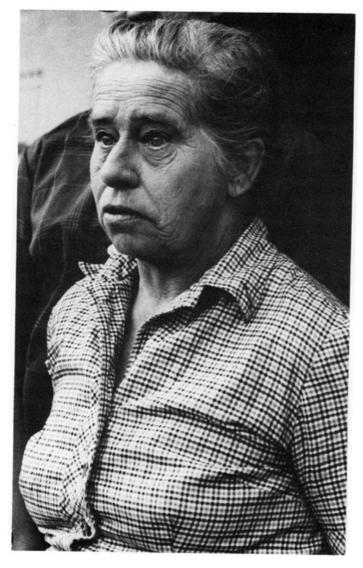
"Modern man has lost the technique of enjoying time for itself, a technique the native mountaineer still enjoys," he said. "Many of us grew up in the mountains and on a farm, and we could sit and enjoy a morning if it happened to be the kind of morning we couldn't work in the fields, without feeling compelled to engage in conversation if there was no subject of interest to us."

The oral tradition, the passing of legends and parables from one generation to another and the entertaining art of storytelling are being replaced by electronic media which substitute other information and entertainment.

"In one way," Mrs. Carleton reflected, "if radios and TVs and all was out, it would bring folks back closer together."

And in an office at Appalachian State University, F. Borden Mace, director of the Appalachian Consortium's "Traditions In Transition" project, expressed deep concern that the native folklore is fading into oblivion. "Not really very much is known about the history and culture of Southern Appalachian folk," he said. "Only the people can tell us. We're trying to find out."

The cultural changes and world situation "goes for the worse," Mrs. Carleton lamented. "If a person 'll open their eyes, I don't see how they can think things are gonna get any better."



Mrs. Lonnie (Ethel) Carleton

Land prices and taxes, for instance. On the Carletons' 72 acres, "it just seems like our land taxes been gettin' awful high for a place without no road or anything. Well, I don't know, just seems like we're taxed to death ever' way we go."

Ten years ago, the county tax rate was 85 cents per \$100 on 45 per cent of assessed value. Today, the rate is 88 cents per \$100 on 65 per cent of assessed value. But despite tax increases, the biggest difference is in higher reassessed property values today. Ten years ago, the tax supervisor's office listed the Carletons with 77 acres assessed at \$1,092. Today, 72 acres is assessed at \$1,710. By comparison, Jason Townsend's 56-acre, mountain-top farm is just over the mountain from Seven Devils resort area in a faster-growing section of the county. Today, its assessed value is \$4,656, as opposed to \$3,719 in 1963.

Dozens of Watauga farm owners have succumbed to the lure of instant money and sold out to developers. Mrs. Bernice Watson's picturesque farm on Brown's Chapel Road now is sprouting pink, prefab houses, and she is living in a mobile home near Boone. Others, such as elderly Jason Townsend and Collis Austin, stubbornly refuse to sell.

"No, I ain't sellin'," Mrs. Carleton said emphatically. "This is the only home I got, and I ain't a-sellin' it. 'Course, the girls don't want us to sell either. We did sell of a little spot down across the creek there, to one o' Lonnie's nephews. But he just seems like one o' my own young'uns."

Still, such developments as Powder Horn Mountain are "a help, because it brings some work closer." And despite generally high prices, "they're not up that much" at Stewart Simmons' Store in Triplett.

Despite the Carletons' relative self-sufficiency, they do supplement with a little money. The "cash crop" is Christmas roping made of evergreen boughs entwined with ivy, for which they now get \$3 per 75-foot roll. They also occasionally sell logs, roots and herbs and "bigwood leaves."

As crude as their rocky road is, it is a recent luxury by comparison with the "old way," which was impassable much of the year when it rained or snowed. They have tried to get the newer road improved, "and they've wrote the governor (former North Carolina Gov. Bob Scott) two or three times. And he told 'em to come and fix this road. They come and staked it off, but then nothin' was ever done," Mrs. Carleton explained.

Until Betty Jo and Susie dropped out of high school, they had to walk a trail over the mountains to an improved gravel road to catch the orange school bus, leaving home at 6:15 a.m. and trudging back at 5 p.m. or later.

After a couple hours of conversation, the Carletons' visitors rose to leave. "Oh, why, y'uns don't need to leave already," Mrs. Carleton insisted, smiling broadly.

"Stay for supper, and we'll kill us a tater and have us some buttermilk."

DEWEY HARMON: MOUNTAIN HUMOR AND GEE-HAW-WHIMMY-DIDDLES

Note: Dewey Harmon, one of the author's favorite people, died from the effects of a heart attack not long after this story was written for the Charlotte Observer in July 1971. The story appears here exactly as it originally was written.

Dewey Harmon's wit is about as keen as the blade of his pocket knife. Which is mighty keen, seeing as how he makes his living with that pocket knife a-carving out bona fide gee-haw-whimmy-diddles, idiot sticks and little roosters.

He's seen 71 summers now. "Goin' on 72, and the women says I'm a-gettin' meaner all the time," he joshes—or brags—however you want to take it.

And when he says things like that a smug little smile plays on his mouth. And his eyes, held apart by a prominent nose under a narrow brow, crinkle at the corners with mischief and bedevilment.

You find Harmon's place away up Beech Creek, somewhere close to the Avery-Watauga County line

and just a stone's throw or so from the Tennessee line, tucked away among high mountains. It's the same neck of the woods where Richard Chase collected many of his famous "Jack Tales" decades ago.

Harmon's a-sitting in a big old easy chair on the porch of his green-trimmed, white frame house, looking down across the gravel road that separates his 80 acres from the dashing, chattering creek. He looks real comfortable in his loose "Old Kentucky" overalls and khaki shirt.

"If that ol' creek didn't rattle I couldn't go to sleep at night," he observes laconically.

Wife Sadie joins him on the porch and commences talking, and he hushes her. "Let your tongue run some other time, woman," he admonishes, trying hard to sound crabby and keep from grinning.

"Ye can see her tongue's loose at both ends," he adds, jerking a thumb in the direction of the screen door and turning to the company.

And Harmon gets to telling about getting hit on the head, years ago, "and ain't had no sense since," and his wife appears again and hugs him and laughs and kisses him on top of the head.

"I told 'em," muses Harmon, "they ain't no use to worry. You crack an ol' gourd, it'll grow back together." He lights a cigarette, smokes it up to the cork filter.

"Hey, ye know all these hot pants these gals wear nowadays?" he switches tracks. "Well, if they're hot pants, they might ketch afire, and if they do, ye know how to put 'em out?" He pauses, poised on the brink of mirth. "Well, you just turn on the panty hose." He chuckles deeply, claps a hand on a knee. An acquaintance says that's "undoubtedly a Dewey original."

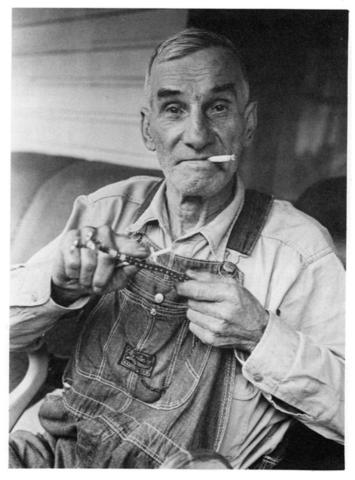
"Aw, if I didn't have any pass-time fun, I wouldn't wanta live," declares Harmon. "I'll be asittin' here a-workin' on a gee-haw-whimmy-diddle or something, and I'll think of me a good joke to get off on somebody. I'll just go get in the ol' car and go get it off on 'em. I can't work anymore 'til I do." He wags his head.

Harmon's been a-making gee-haw-whimmy-diddles "five, six years now," and they've been selling like hotcakes through a mountain crafts cooperative. His wife is also a member, sewing beautiful little cloth dolls of storybook characters.

"I broke my back with a log at the sawmill," explains Harmon. "Can't lift anything, so I had to make these or something. I gotta do something, I can't just lay down and do nothin'. I worked all my life."

He hustles into the house and comes out with a fancy three-pronged gee-haw-whimmy-diddle, which is unusual because they usually just have a single prong, or at most two prongs.

He briskly rubs the rubbing stick over the notches atop the three-pronged stick and sets all three tiny propellers a-spinning to the left. Almost imper-



Dewey Harmon demonstrating his three-pronged gee-haw-whimmy-diddle

ceptibly, he shifts technique and the propellers respond to the different vibrations and reverse direction. Harmon smiles with satisfaction.

"Made this'n outa ivy, but I usually use laurel. I have even made 'em with up to seven prongs, but that takes too long. Oh, I can average about one a hour, after I've got the right sticks and them dried out right and all.

"I just take my time now, though. I'm gettin' a little nervous, and I might cut the notches wrong or something. Now, ye take that outbuilding there, I've got ever' kind of stick that's ever been thought of in there. A man goes in there, he's bound to fall over a stick of some kind," he says, grinning.

"Yeah, I've had a lotta fun with 'em. You know, they's a lotta people you can't even learn how to work 'em. You show 'em and show 'em, and they still can't do it." Another grin.

Harmon's even tried to show people in Rhode Island and Washington, D. C., where the crafts co-op sent him a week each to crafts fairs.

His five children are up and grown, "and the woods 're full of grandchildren." Wife Sadie pokes her head out the door and says, "Thirteen grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren." And Harmon says, "Lord, yes, I've been busy." An impish look in the eyes and another cigarette.

"Now be sure'n come back," he bids you. "Takes about ever'body around here to keep me straight, but they like me and we get along."

REV. CHARLES A. KEYES: "THE PARSON OF THE HILLS."

Like St. Francis of Assisi, little Charlie Keyes started out preaching to the birds. With a few differences.

"My early efforts, at the age of five," writes Keyes, "were somewhat unusual and aroused much curiosity in the neighborhood (in West Jefferson, North Carolina, in mountain-locked Ashe County). Hens and chickens were my audience, and I preached to them in the yard back of my father's produce building, standing on a chicken coop."

Within the year, he graduated to people. The blue-eyed moppet would perch on an egg crate or tree stump to meet their eyes.

About 40 years later, a Kansas lady mailed Keyes, now the silver-haired, legendary "Parson of the Hills," a yellowed old clipping. "Ripley's Believe It Or Not."

About the five-year-old "wonder boy" preacher of the Appalachian mountains.

The clipping evoked a quixotic smile. Forty years. All still vivid. Tremendous ambitions; mighty disappointments. Eye-dampening joys; scalp-cringing dangers. The aroma of honeysuckle; the stench of rotgut liquor. A talk with the governor; exhortations to snuff-dippin' bootleggers, moonshiners, cutthroats, rattlesnake cultists and whisky-nippin' grannies of the backwoods.

In recent years, the rusticly eloquent Parson became even more widely known as an implacable poverty-fighter among the same remote, shack-dotted coves and ridges. But all those early years are priceless to him.

Fifteen years ago, he committed to paper some of the pithy episodes of those earlier years. A wellheeled doctor financed their printing by a subsidy house. They languished, never promoted or commercially exploited. The thin tome, entitled "Parson of the Hills," is many things. Sometimes hilariously droll, without meaning to be. Sometimes grippingly dramatic. Sometimes flecked with wit and understatement with a straight face.

And it always rings true, with some of the most accurate, rich descriptions and neo-Elizabethan dialogue, riddled with picturesque idioms, to be found in the language.

The Parson disclaims being a writer. Just 'telling it

like it was.' But who else could describe the odor of bad moonshine as "so strong that you couldn't smell a passing skunk." Or Wilkes County, North Carolina as "this dangerous county of back-hill bootleggers, where every stranger was considered a foreigner." Or the moonshiners' suspiciousness: "No foreigner was welcome who had any objections to this mountain way of turning corn into silver."

The volume traces the Parson's trails through childhood, the feverish teens, the tireless young adulthood. Travel was usually on foot. His cathedrals were usually brush arbors.

Once, still very young, he took to a West Jefferson street corner to preach against strong drink, a major theme during those days. Afterward, hot, tired, thirsty, he entered a cafe, asked for a drink of water. Instead, the waiter cracked him in the head with a hammer. He sprawled, got up, blacked out, woke up in a doctor's office with his head bandaged up. The assailant, arrested, tried, fined, said he did it because the Parson knocked "the liquor business."

The greater the danger from moonshiners, the braver he seemed to get. His enemies nicknamed him "Sledgehammer Charlie," and the moniker spread across the mountains. Once, back in Ashe County for one of his biggest revivals, he was rocked, then found his tires slashed, paint scratched up, engine ruined by dirt in the gas tank. That crusade won over numerous notorious bootleggers, and an incredible headline in

the county newspaper, the Skyland Post, blared:

"SLEDGEHAMMER CHARLIE" DECLARES
WAR IN LITTLE COMMUNITY AREA WHILE
HITLER IS GETTING READY TO FIGHT IN EUROPE

Finally, he prepared to foray into the Trap Hill section of Wilkes County. A friendly old-timer warned him:

"Them varmints....don't want a preacher or anybody coming in preaching against what they're making their living with—and preacher, if they don't put a bullet through your haid you shore will have a tough time a-staying thar. Why, the revenooers and sheriffs don't meddle in them thar parts any more, and if they want to live they better not meddle in Trap Hill."

Prophetic. The Parson did "meddle." Overnight, a \$400 tent was cut to pieces. Songbooks ripped apart. Benches broken up. Keys torn out of the organs. Pulpit overturned.

Besides real peril, there were the constant little frustrations. "I often went into far, almost isolated, sections, where there were no churches, no religious institutions, no schools, no anything. I would clear out a place in the woods, build a brush arbor and begin preaching. The only light I had at night services was a lantern or two hanging from a tree and some old pop bottles of kerosene with wicks stuck through their necks.

"I preached and fought insects at the same time. Once as I was preaching, a large bug went straight down my throat. I quickly picked up a fruit jar filled with water and washed it on down, as it seemed to be headed down instead of up."

And again, when a "big, husky backwoods preacher came in and told how he had been converted from making corn liquor. As he testified he began to get more and more emotional. He had been standing beside the pulpit as he talked. Suddenly he made a high leap in the air, and when he came down he disappeared through the floor. His weight was too much for the old floor boards to sustain.

"After climbing back through the hole in the floor, he went over and borrowed an old fellow's hat, then walked through the congregation asking contributions to repair the damage. He soon raised several dollars "

Or the time he got head-spinning drunk on a huge dose of "cold remedy" kindly offered by a sweet little old granny in apron and bonnet.

Or the time a pot-bellied stove blew its pipe, belching smoke and soot, choking him as he continued singing, trying to hold his audience. After 40 minutes of problems, the service resumed with the hymn, "Farther along, tempted and tried, we'll understand it better by and by."

Or the time a drunk dumped a whole jar of soursmelling, eye-stinging whiskey over his head.

Or well, the stories could go on and on.

The joyous wail and driving beat of an old gospel hymn bursts from the rickety little mission church, almost drowning the clatter of the pickup truck bouncing down the twisting, rocky lane that falls steeply from Horseshoe Bend to the isolated hollow far below.

".... Nothing but the blood of Jeee-sus."

The pickup swings around the last elbow and roars to a stop next to the mission's front porch. "Chicken-coop churches," the Parson of the Hills, Rev. Charles A. Keyes, calls these crudely built missions he helped start. There is a touch of endearment in the term when he says it.

This "chicken-coop" church roosts precariously on the steep, scrubby mountainside just above two hovels in the bottom of the hollow. Built from scraps and fresh saplings by men from this Wilkes County, North Carolina area only recently, it still has no sign, no cross, no outward identification.

The Parson, a friend named Jim Stevens, and a writer roll out of the pickup and into the bright, cold Sunday afternoon. Several overalled men, playing hooky, stand in the wood chips at the side of the mission where a stovepipe belches piney-smelling, bluish smoke.

Another gospel song erupts inside as the floorboards thunder with the surging rhythm of happy, thumping feet. One of the men takes up the beat, a heavy shoe patting the wood chips, but they continue huddling against the icy wind and commenting on the



A Wilkes County mountain woman, proud of her mid-winter catch of fish

weather or the pitifully crippled white mongrel dog or the two ponies rearing and nipping each other in the pasture below.

Inside, the fervor of the hymn-singing is nearing the crescendo. An elderly, plumpish woman hops gingerly to the beat, her eyes closed, her knuckles white as she rapidly clashes a pair of well-worn brass cymbals.

A middle-aged man, one leg hung loosely over the other knee, leans forward over the second-hand banjo he plinks feverishly. Another, a Negro visitor, keeps time on a shiny snare drum while his wife dances about ecstatically.

The other dozen adults pat their feet and sing with a gusto that belies their meager numbers. A few restless children are scattered in the cramped room, their pallid faces reddening from the heat of the rusty iron stove near the center.

For both adults and children, religion and the little mission are focal points of their lives. Coming to this "chicken-coop" church is a bright, happy event in their otherwise poverty-ridden existence.

They are surprised today when the silver-haired Parson strides through the ill-fitting door, because they usually know in advance when he can come. He sits among some men in the pulpit area where there is no pulpit yet. Someone in Hickory is building one.

An impromptu quartet belts out another rollicking gospel hymn to choruses of amens. One of the sweating young men dips with a Glove Kid peanut



Maybelle Pike, 11, with her first new doll—a gift at the "Parson of the Hills" huge annual "Christmas on the Mountain" party

butter jar into the galvanized steel water bucket on a table in the pulpit area, drinks deeply, and smiles contentedly. Sunlight streaming through a small window catches the jar, and beads of water on the oily interior glisten like jewels.

"If I could hear my mother pray again" the little congregation sings with quivering voices.

The Negro woman preaches a few minutes, emphatically laying the racial problems of this age on hate and "that ol' Devil" and shouting a message of brotherly love among all, white folks and colored folks. The white folks interject strong amens, and some hug her.

After a quiet, shy, hands-in-pockets testimonial by a thin, elderly man, the Parson is asked to "say a few words." He relents, saying that this is their own meeting today and that he is "not going to get all wound up."

"Why, I got all wound up at the little mission down there in Hickory the other night. Ended up runnin' right through the door and preachin' out in the street," he smiles. Loud amens and approving nods and grins.

The Parson proceeds to get "all wound up," periodically disclaiming his intention to do so. The folks love it. One middle-aged woman, leaping up to shout Amen, tips over one of the rough-built, slat benches.

"Bless 'er Lord," mumbles a small, balding man in oversized overalls. Others take up the cadence of amens and blessings, with the hot tempo of the preaching.

An hour or more later, the Parson's blistering condemnation of a multitude of sins bumps to a halt. The children scurry outside while the grown-ups hug and smile and shake hands and chat all around. The women tug their wraps tighter, and some of the men talk with their backsides close to the still-hot stove and their calloused hands tucked in the bibs of their overalls

Outside again, the icy wind blasts up the hollow more fiercely and whips across the little mission porch. Men, women and children shiver, scrunch up their shoulders, and begin scrambling into the beds of two pickup trucks.

The Parson is smiling and talking with a group of them. "I'd a lot rather come down to a poor little church like this, where good, poor folks like you-all can just come in your overalls and get your minds on religion and not be worrying about your fine clothes, or your big fine church and everything else," he tells them.

"Amen, amen brother," they respond, their faces cheery, their spirits fortified for another week's onslaught of despair and poverty.

"A MAN'S FRIENDS IS ALL HE'S GOT "

Bip-beep. Bip-bip-bee-ee-eep, blasts an auto horn. The raucous sound shatters the soothing quiet of dusk on the wooded hillside around widely known artist Philip Moose's painting-filled studio-home on a rocky lane a few miles south of Blowing Rock, North Carolina.

"Sylvester," says Moose, smiling and rolling his eyes. "That couldn't be anybody else. Sylvester Coffey."

He hustles to the kitchen door as Coffey piles out of the red station wagon, leaving it idling and the lights burning. The elderly visitor, tall, gaunt as a hungry bear, tromps in among the paintings and artifacts and remnants of a gourmet dinner, then swings one lean, overalled leg onto the corner of the well-appointed bar.

Just dropped by for something to wet his tonsils. He's 65, lives alone in a little place on the opposite hillside, is the "hardest-working man I know," says Moose. Practically indestructible. Take, a falling tree crushed his shoulder and the doctor said he wouldn't ever be good for much anymore, but in less than a year you couldn't tell it ever happened to him.

Well, pretty soon Coffey's all wound up and talking like a buzz saw, a non-stop monologue rambling on a couple of hours, spellbinding. He's a caretaker for some plush mountain homes, and he and Moose have been sort of buddies a long time now, although they're about as different as night is from day in a lot of ways.

The monologue gives you an encyclopedia's worth of education on a hundred subjects, from escapades of a "High Sheriff" up in West Virginny to cold remedies to life histories of his zillion relatives to tales from his daddy and granddaddy, all laced with vivid Elizabethan terms and dramatic bursts of song.

The spontaneous songs just come in snatches, excerpts appropriate to the momentary subject. None are familiar to the lowlander's ears, except once when he cuts loose with part of "House of the Risin' Sun."

Finally, he ambles toward the door, pumps your hand with a big, powerful, grizzled hand, says; "Yessir, glad to o' met ye. A man's friends is all he's got. Yessir." He climbs into the station wagon, its engine still whirring, lights still beaming.

"A man's friends is all he's got"

PRIDE, INDEPENDENCE AND BUCKETS MADE OF TREE BARK

Jason Townsend, getting on in years, needs no words to speak of peace and satisfaction, pride and independence. His quiet life speaks for itself

You clatter up the steep, twisting gravel road, then spatter up a muddy lane high into the Appalachians, high above the pastoral valley of Valle Crucis, North Carolina into a lush vale among fog-shrouded peaks. You grind to a stop under an ancient apple tree heavy with little green fruit.

He sits on an old hickory-bottomed chair in the basement doorway, busy hands lacing a poplar-bark bucket with long strips of leathery hickory bark, pale blue eyes squinting in the pearly gray light of cloudsifted sunrays. Around him are heaps of moist bark, a stool cluttered with simple tools, rows and rows of glass jars of fruits and vegetables on musty shelves in the dim cavern of the basement.

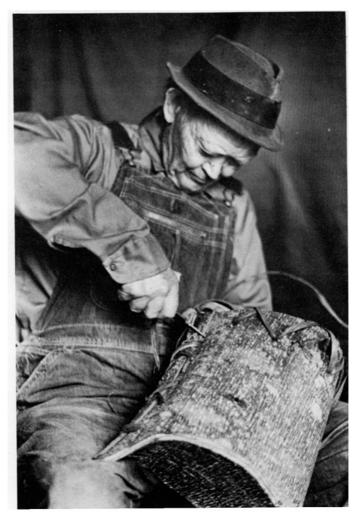
He hunches over his craft in baggy "Jack Rabbit" overalls and gray workshirt, his thin white hair mostly hidden by a comfortable old narrow-brimmed hat of brown felt. The nose is small and thin, the weathered face white-whiskered.

The hands pause. The face cracks into a hearty smile, open and friendly. Visitors are few and far between, and welcomes are warm and honest.

Townsend lives with his wife, 72, who's been feeling puny lately, on 57 acres that stretches all the way to the bottom by the creek, where he gets most of his good poplar bark. He bought most of the land "40 year ago, I guess." And there he raised 10 children ("just' got seven a-livin"") and lived to see 24 grand-children. "An' let's see, I reckon we've got four great-grandchildren," he says, smiling. "I believe the first day of September I'll be 77."

Now the nimble hands fly again, punching eyelets up the sides of the bark bucket, then around the top, with the pointed end of a file. "A feller don't have to have much tools for that—a file's the best thing I ever used."

The hands are going all the time he talks, fitting a white-oak bark hoop in the top, then fashioning a hickory bark shoulder strap. Finally, he holds it at arm's length, looks with satisfaction.



Jason Townsend making a poplar-bark bucket

He begins another, scratching a mark, cutting, bending the bark so it pops into shape. The buckets are one-piece, and the way it's done is simple but ingenious. Townsend is the only craftsman in these parts still making bark buckets, which he can sell through a flourishing young crafts cooperative. The demand recently has soared, so he now has an order for 1,500 and can sell all he makes.

"White walnut makes a awful good 'un, but they ain't any of them anymore," he says wistfully. "I saw my dad make 'em like this long ago, when I was a boy. An' then, way back, I'd get in a huckleberry patch or somethin' and I'd get out of a bucket, so I'd just make me one.

"Yep, it kills a poplar when its skinned. That's the bad part. That's the reason I always chop 'em down, so I can get all there is in 'em. Sometimes I get enough bark for 18, 20 off one tree.

"I used to lay rock, but I can't lift too good anymore. I used to make just a few buckets to sell, an' I thought I's a-doin' well to get 50 cents for one this size. Now I can get \$2.75."

You reckon aloud that he's glad for the crafts co-op, the good market, the dignity of independence in old age. And his sensitivity and pride well up inside him, and he answers very casually:

"Oh, they ain't really much in it, not much money a-tall, time a feller goes and packs 'em outa the woods an' all. I jus' like to do it. Jus' a pass-time"

A SCHOLAR IN OVERALLS: HE LOVES THE MOUNTAINS AND GREAT BOOKS

The chipped ice in the rust-splotched, old-fashioned soft drink box felt good to your hot, sweaty hands as you fished for a tall cola and felt the inquiring eyes of the old men sitting around the cramped country store.

The ice-cold, sweetish liquid felt even better gurgling down your parched throat. It had been one of those seemingly endless days when, traveling afoot and bearing a heavy pack, eight hours and almost 20 miles seem like twice the time and distance.

You had scrambled along the cool creek bottoms. Clambored across craggy Appalachian ridge-tops. Climbed a steep, twisting, rocky trail out of the last deep gorge. Meandered with the weed-grown traces of an old wagon road and emerged on a gravel road near the store in the orange light of evening.

Strangers in those remote parts were scarce enough, but you with your scruffy whiskers, orange pack and green canteens, assorted dangling, strange gear and funny-looking European boots must have looked like a creature from outer space to the placid, overalled men. Their mumble of easy talk had died abruptly, as the night-sounds by a wooded pond fall silent at the snap of a twig under a human intruder's heel.

"Good country, here," you said, smiling, chug-alugging the cola. Grunts. A couple of tentative nods. "Some beautiful places back in there," you said, jerking your head toward the wilderness. "How far's it down the road to the highway?" you asked.

"Coupla miles. Not more'n three," answered the proprietor, a heavy-bellied man in a blue-checked flannel shirt. You asked other questions, interspersed with observations. The answers or acknowledgments were brief, courteous but timid and guarded, the inner thoughts as masked as those of adept poker players.

With one exception. One thin-boned fellow who seemed slightly apart from the others, hunkered on his elbows on the end of the long, linoleum-topped counter, his deep-set gray eyes and the corners of his mouth now and then subtly revealing amusement and friendly interest.

"Where you come from?" he finally inquired. "Oh, Charlotte, North Carolina. I been through there a few times." He moseyed out onto the front porch as if inviting you out of ear-shot, and you ambled out and leaned against a weather-grayed post.

His name was Adrian Waddell. About 60. High cheekbones and thick thatches of aluminum-flecked hair. Chain-smoked Camels, letting neglected ashes drop onto his overalls, then flicking them off with his brown-stained middle finger.

You talked until night had settled over the black hills. Back before the Great Depression, he said, he'd traveled a little, gone off to college a year and a half until hard times forced him to drop out and head for Dee-troit to look for a job. After two, three years, he decided that wasn't any kind of life so he went out west. Tended sheep a year. And finally wound up back in these hills from where he came. He was like a lot of young folks in the mountains, he said, who feel a compulsive itch to run and hide from their Appalachian heritage. But then, unlike many of them, home beckoned to him and he responded with newfound pride.

Waddell had carved out a quiet, good life, he said, raising five good children and watching them graduate from college and scatter across the nation. Had a good wife with good sense. Had three cows and two mules and plenty of chickens and a lot of books.

Books? Yeah. Shakespeare, history, the poets, philosophy. Things like that. Good stuff. "Now, you take these fellers here," he said, gesturing toward the store's front door. "They're pretty good fellers. Kinda shy about strangers, kinda tight-lipped about things they're not familiar with. But good fellers.

"But," he added, breaking into a wide, mischie-

vous grin, "they think I'm kinda high-falutin". Not to mention, kinda peculiar. I don't mind that. I understand 'em."

Waddell paused, reflected awhile, then explained, "You hear on TV the term 'ego trip.' It's said like it's something bad. Well, it could be bad. But the way I look at it, everybody's on some kinda ego trip. Everybody needs to feel good about himself. That's natural as eating or going to the toilet. But most people play the hypocrite, try to down-grade themselves in public, afraid people 'll think they're puttin' on the dog if they're honest.

"Yeah, we're all on an ego trip, one kind 'er another. The only question is, if you've got the grace to pull it off with the right charm to get by with it. Take, for instance, William Faulkner. Arrogant man. Or that genius, Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect."

Waddell paused again, fired another cigarette, continued, "Now take me. My trouble is, I forget myself. I'll mention Shaw or Napoleon or Socrates or somebody—one of my friends—in the store. Or somebody 'll see me walking the woods, talking with the greats, the great men.

"It's a funny kind of life I've had. Couldn't do everything I wanted to. But I could, in a way, through the books. Feel like I know 'em. Walk with the great men. They're my closest friends. Actually, y' know, you can get to know them far deeper, more thorough than most flesh-and-blood people you live amongst"

AGGIE LOWRANCE, A LATE-BLOOMING WILDFLOWER

Aggie Lowrance at 71 had more vim than a sackful of wildcats. And more imagination than a three-headed professor.

So the sprightly widow found her thing, like a wildflower bursting into full, glorious color after the first snow of winter.

After a full life as mountain farm wife and mother, she's lately blossomed into an unusually creative designer, teacher and craftswoman. Her colorful designs for impish, cuddly, hand-sewn dolls of storybook characters have been smash hits at the nation's major craft shows. And she's one big reason for the success of a thriving young co-op of mountain craftsmen, Blue Ridge Hearthside Crafts Association Inc., headquartered in Sugar Grove, North Carolina.

Not that a late-bloomer is unique, but she walks in some tall company. Grandma Moses, for instance, first picked up a paint brush and palette at 76. Sir Winston Churchill, already past a career as statesman, leaped into the literary world and won a Nobel Prize as an octogenarian. Socrates flowered through the crust of obscurity at about 80. Most of the world first heard of Mahatma Ghandi in the winter of his life

Aggie lives in an old homeplace up Dutch Creek, in a remote, lush valley out from Valle Crucis, North Carolina. It's "Aggie" because that's what everybody calls her and it would sound phony to talk about "Mrs. Lowrance."

She was putting up corn, canning for the oncoming winter, that warm, late-summer afternoon when company came. She was happy and the birds were warbling and the creek was gurgling by the front porch and the sun was smiling brightly on the good earth.

Aggie would remind you of a sort of grand-motherly Alice in Wonderland. Prim, green-print dress and little-girl shoes, black patent leather Mary Janes. Silver-sprinkled hair bobbed short. A pixie's twinkling eyes behind glasses.

And her manner, with expressive hands and quick quips and wide-eyed delight at little things such as a baby frog or lemon yellow mushroom along the steep, wooded path up to splashing Dutch Creek Falls. Although she lived here all her life, she has an oddly Yankee clip to her speech attributed to travels to crafts shows in New York and Miami and Washington.

In her small living room were reminders of her earlier life, of her two sons, grown and gone, and her husband, passed on six years before. And there were new things, a little picture book of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" on a lamp table and several recently designed cats on the sofa, fat-bellied orange and yellow cats with skinny, floppy arms and black bow ties and mischievous green eyes

Aggie sat with toes tucked back under her chair, fairly crackling with energy as she talked, like a wiggly little girl in Sunday School. She didn't know where all that talent came from.

"I just like to create things. And I like people" She'd learned sewing, going to the Valle Crucis Mission School awhile as a child. And later, she worked there a bit, and when the girls gave plays she helped with the costumes.

Then about 1968, the budding co-op sort of discovered her when she came up with the first of the now-famous "upside-down" dolls, a combination of Hansel and Gretel and the Old Witch. One thing led to another, and soon she was designing all the dolls, plus talent scouting and teaching classes of mountain women. It was not long until she was elected a member of Hearthside's board of directors.

"I'm feeling much better about it (the co-op) than ever before. It'll sure work, if everybody 'll keep



Aggie Lowrance with one of her lovable dolls

at it," Aggie said. "It's been a struggle. Sometimes we'd get to the place we thought, 'this is it.' But then we'd pick up and start again. We'd never give up.

"It's been a great thing for a lot of mountain people. I was able to get qualified for Social Security, for one thing, by this chance to earn money. I know it's kept a lot off welfare, and some of them make real good at it now." She smiled, straightened her neat dress, and listened to the gurgle of Dutch Creek.

Aggie's creativity forms a pattern. She'll daydream over a children's story, remembering how she heard it and felt about it and visualized it as a child, begin sketching her impressions on paper in the evening, sleep on it, then bounce out of bed the next morning and sew a model.

And when will she retire now, give up her crafts? "When I'm laid to rest," she quipped, shrugging and giggling.

HORSE-TRADIN' OVER FOOL'S GOLD

Other than the old man's odor of sweat, the first thing you noticed was the furtive, steel-gray eyes set wide in the knobby head and anchored by a leathery, hawksbill nose.

The watery eyes bulged from high, thin cheekbones like those of a popeyed bullfrog being clutched tightly by a little boy. And they flicked about constantly from side to side and face to face and back again, habitually, as if the old man had always feared assassination.

Your nostrils cringed before you glanced toward the bent figure, because the blustery wind whipped through the door of the grimy little store and around his overalled frame. He shuffled inside, angled for the glass-topped knick-knack case where several mountain men drooped in conversation. A withered hand fished inside the greasy overalls as if seeking money.

Instead, the jittery hand produced a fist-sized rock, plunked it gingerly on the counter, then continued digging and fidgeting inside the baggy overalls, finally yielding two dimes.

The rock glittered, golden.

"Gimme a Pepsi, Cap'n," the old man squished through snuff-stained stubs of teeth. He must have been 70 or 75, but they were hard years.

Two angular men perched on upright soft-drink crates hauled themselves erect, moseyed over to the counter, joined the others propped on elbows. They all gaped slack-jawed at the rock.

"Wal, wha's this?" one thin, red-faced man finally ventured.

"Hey, ain't that purty?" exclaimed another.

"Yeah," breathed a hefty one. "Hey feller, that 'ere wouldn't be gold, would it? I know it's been known to be a lotta gold in these ol' mountains."

Now, mountain men tend to be just natural-born sharp horse-traders, but this crowd didn't have much on the old stranger. The old man played it coy, thoughtfully scratched the stubble on his jaw, slowed the darting eyes to a bovine roll.

"Hey there. Dolph Elmond here." He eyed their faces.

"Wal, I'd jus' as soon ye didn't mention nothin' about that 'ere rock." He hung his head, concentrated

hard on the cracked leather of his brogans.

"Hey, we's jus' wonderin'," nasaled the thin one.

"Wal, Cap'n," rasped the old man, straightening and tucking the gnarled hands cross-armed under the armpits. "Wal, yep. It's gold awright. Found it hereabouts. That's jus' a sample. They's truckloads of it.

"Now, I ain't sayin' zactly where, but it's here. Why, the gold in that 'ere one piece is worth more'n a hundred dollars."

The fever was on.

They pumped the old man for the location. No luck. They backed up and hem-hawed around, then ployed more tactfully. No luck. Veiled threats. No luck.

"Tell ye what, Cap'n," Elmond tucked his chin. "I'll jus' let ye have that 'ere piece for \$50.

The gold fever mounted.

Only no one had \$50.

You picked up the rock. Granite criss-crossed with veins of milky quartz. Encrusted all over with clusters of twinkling golden granules.

Pyrite. Virtually worthless, except for a handsome doorstop or paperweight. More commonly known as "fool's gold."

The old man was grateful for the dollar he got for the rock. He needed it, and besides, it was a pretty chunk of glitter for the buyer.

And the old man had been trying to sell it for a long time.

A FOOT-STOMPING JAM SESSION IN THE OLD GAS STATION

All the foot-stomping in the little Haywood County, North Carolina gas station was practically rattling the windows. It was one of those almost mystical experiences that inexplicably swell out of people's deepest well-springs to flood and then engulf the whole group with a mesmerizing unity of feeling.

"Turtle," who was called that apparently because his large head bobbed on a stubby neck buried in scrunched shoulders, was lurching in time to the music while his big feet were clopping in all directions like barges gone berzerk in cross-tides. The gas pump jockey, a skinny, older man in grease-burnished green twill pants, was hunkering on a water can and smiling broadly as he clapped his big-knuckled hands. A young feller, maybe 19, was showing his stuff with a hot-tempo clogging exhibition. Two other men in overalls munched peanuts and patted their high-top shoes on the gray-painted floor.

"Hey, Ern, let's hear us some more o' that 'Wildwood Flower,' how 'bout it?" bellowed the pump jockey. Old Ern—his name was Ernest Albright—grinned like a possum in a sweet potato patch. He was the cause of all this unfettered joy, and he plainly knew it.

"Yeah," said Turtle, "Ol' Ern can make 'at thing talk to you." He was talking about Old Ern's hand-crafted banjo. Old Ern beamed even broader, baring some gums between clusters of teeth. He sat on a Coke crate, leaned back against some cans of motor oil, patted his banjo and began plinking feverishly, rocking his tall, angular, hunchbacked frame.

It was a late afternoon in mid-May, and the orange sky to the west tinted the men's faces a ruddy Titian cast. The dark green mountains stood high, almost scraping the purplish rainclouds drifting ominously eastward.

"Ey Law'," one of the overalled men said when Old Ern finished the 'Wildwood Flower' encore, "I better shake a leg before them clouds cut loose like a cow on a flat rock." Then Turtle said, yeah, his old lady 'd be after his hide if he let the vittles get cold. They moseyed off.

Old Ern went silent a moment and started idly picking at a little spider web that was about the same

silvery color as the stubble of whiskers on his leathery face. Then he commenced playing some sombre hymns, "Shall We Gather At The River" and "When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder." It was amazing, how well he could chord the banjo. Because his left hand was a three-digit flurry of motion. There were two stubs where the little finger and ring finger were ripped off by a buzz saw years ago.

Another peculiarity was the excellent tone of the banjo, because Old Ern makes them square instead of round. It was a pretty nice piece of craftsmanship, too, with designs made by tacking brass upholstery studs into the woodwork.

He sells one of the square banjos around Asheville "ever" once in awhile," he said. "Get \$10, sometimes \$12 or \$15 apiece for 'em." Mostly, though, he picks up money in the fall and winter hauling "cord wood" into the Asheville area and other towns for city folks' fireplaces.

"Oh, my cord wood 'll make yer coffee pot whistle," Old Ern bragged, grinning.

There was a bit of talk about where he was from, up some creek you never heard of, and about his long and interesting life and what it was like in "olden times." He told some tall tales about his daddy and his big brood of young'uns. "My daddy was strict as a hickory stick," he said. "My daddy, rest 'is soul, was meaner'n a big copperhead at matin' time. But he kep' us kids set straight an' narrow. Yessir."

Did Old Ern know any of the old mountain ballads?

"Oh yessir, indeedy," he crowed, perking up his playing fingers again. He lit into a soulful rendition of "Barbry Allen," then jazzed the same ballad with some gospel-type improvisations. And he picked out a couple of old children's songs, sprightly, dainty tunes for skipping or dancing that sounded similar to some old English lute music.

By now another crowd had gathered in the gas station. Old Ern was looking for a ride into "the big town," but nobody was going that way.

"Hey, Ern," the gas pump jockey roared again, "how 'bout one more piece o' that 'Wildwood Flower' fer these fellers?" The possum grin spread across Old Ern's face again. He drained his Pepsi bottle, washing down some peanut butter-crackers, and reared back like a proud patriarch.

Pulling around the rusty old gas pump and onto the blacktop road, you could clearly hear the zinging banjo above all the foot-stomping and whooping. Old Ern was doing his stuff. "ALL THE SIGNS WERE WRONG FOR PIG-BUTCHERING "

If you think a pet pig named Cherry sounds improbable, just ponder the rest of the crazy, improbable-but-true tale. The story begins at the end, when Herb Stevens' wife Helene enters her dining room bearing a scrumptious casserole. Only, she can't eat a bite. And she looks melancholy.

"Well, part of Cherry's in that casserole," she explains. "And I just keep remembering her when she was alive, how she'd squeal when I'd go down to feed her, how I'd scratch her back with a stick"

Big Herb can eat okay. His friends had kidded him about how he couldn't really kill Cherry, but he had committed the act Saturday, single-handedly. He always had a lot of pets, had a great deal of feeling for animals, but "they're not as important as human beings," he said. He can deliver a powerful lecture on how American meat-eating humans are hypocritical, impersonally chomping away on beef they bought in a clean, pretty package, all the brutal, dirty work done.

Herb regularly speaks strongly that way. Just his nature, the rugged individualist. He's a huge guy, 31, six-foot-seven, 220 pounds of lean muscle and broadshouldered frame, with intense, flashing brown eyes and striking moustache. His voice thunders when he gets excited by an idea.

Big Herb got himself educated, built a new house on a knoll staring at the stony face of Table Rock Mountain in Burke County, North Carolina and began commuting daily to a job as principal of rural Pilot Mountain Junior High School. He was a pretty capable mountaineer, but somehow his education had neglected to take in some of the more practical bits of native wisdom—such as, how to butcher a pig.

"The whole experience with the pig was a riot, a comedy of errors from beginning to end," he grins, staring up at Table Rock.

"Like Saturday. It was the weirdest quirk of weather-it was warm. Now, any fool knows, I'm told, it's gotta be freezing at pig-killing time. But then, what the hell does Swift and Company do in August?

"All the signs were wrong for a pig-butchering, some neighbors tell me. The moon was all wrong. Not only wrong, but exactly opposite of where it's supposed to be. I still don't entirely understand it." He heaves a big, dramatic sigh of resignation.

"And then, like an idiot, I had to do it alone. Not to prove anything. Just that I didn't want anybody helping me, who would find out how ignorant I am.

"Oh, I had gotten all those little booklets on it. Like this one with the blood stains on it. I'd flip through here while I worked on Cherry.

"But there's nothing in here that says, 'one man should not try to butcher a hog alone.' If I hadn't been so stupid, I'd have noticed that the illustrations all showed two men doing the job."

Ultimately—and utterly exhausted—he managed to get about 110 pounds of meat out of the 200 pound carcas.

"But the biggest fiasco—well, let me start at the beginning. You see, we had this garbage problem over at Pilot Mountain (school). They had always dumped the wet garbage in a hole in back of the school. So I thought something needed to be done. At the same time, I said, 'Heck, it's crazy to throw all this good garbage away.' So one day in September I went down to Valdese and bought this pig. And then I would haul the wet garbage home to feed it.

"Now, I've always for some reason liked pigs—had a fascination for them, you know, like some people like horses. The two kids named this one Cherry.

"Anyway, then came a strange turn of events. One day not long ago, I came into my office (at school). The secretary said, 'You got the funniest phone call.' She said, 'There was this guy with the heaviest Russian accent, who said he was from the U. S. Department of Agriculture.' When he asked her how we disposed of the wet garbage, she told him the principal took it home to feed a pig. Whereupon, he said it was against the law, and to have me call him. A 'Dr. Borshenko,' or something.

"So I called the number, which must have been wrong. Of course, I didn't know it, so when a guy answered, I launched into a big excuse about how I thought the cholera law just applied to feeding pigs wet garbage in commercial operations, and how this was just a private family thing.

"That guy listened, silently. Finally, he said, like, 'I don't know what the hell you're talking about, buddy, this is a druggist at Eckerd's.' So I thought, a-ha, Stevens, you really are a sucker. A Dr. Borshenko, indeed. A thick Russian accent, indeed. I was certain it was a prank by this teacher-friend of mine, who would do that kind of thing.

"I thought up one for him-a prank-but then, it turned out he didn't know what I was talking about either. So I thought, maybe there really is a Dr. Borshenko. I called all around, and finally I got ahold of him-in the flesh-at the local agriculture office."

Herb effects a brilliant mimic of a gruff, stern, authoritarian Russian accent growling out of the phone.

"Finally, I said I'd stop taking the garbage home,

and he said okay, then, he wouldn't prosecute me," grins Herb. "But then, we still had the garbage problem. I went over to see the county lunchroom supervisor, Pat Foreman, and explained the whole mess. I said I knew someone who would haul it off. Me—for \$2.75 every two weeks.

"That's exactly how much whole-hog ration Cherry was eating, so I would break even. After all, I only bought the pig as a solution to the garbage problem. So we made the agreement, although I would only be paid the whole amount at the end of the year.

"Actually, in the meantime, the school custodian has been taking a lot of the garbage home to some hunting dogs of his, so it looks doubtful now that they'll pay me." Herb looks a little impish.

"Yeah, strange the way it worked out. Now, make it clear I didn't dupe anybody, because I didn't. But for awhile, I thought this was probably the only county in the state paying—directly or indirectly—to feed a pig."

Big Herb hunches the massive shoulders in laughter, rolls the brown eyes in mock horror, like a silent screen comic would do after a monumental goof.

AN APPALACHIAN FRONTIER HOMESTEAD

This is peace

Pure peace, sitting atop the world with Al and Robin Ulmer and Baby Laurel on their remote mountain crest straddling the Tennessee-North Carolina line.

Sharing their rustic hearth and bountiful food, their uninhibited laughter and sweet silence, their intoxicating sense of freedom.

From their primitive homestead, miles from the nearest human being, it seems you can see all the Earth spread below. Endless, rippling waves of purplish and bluish mountain ranges and mist-veiled greenish valleys to the farthest horizons. Capped by the vast blue dome of the whole cosmos. You feel like Zeus on Mount Olympus.

The Ulmers are rare people living a rare life in a rare setting. They are true pioneers, as surely as the first tough, independent families who conquered

these hard mountains were pioneers. They are more akin to the spirit of mountain life and work than most who are born among the hills, although Al and Robin immigrated by choice and dream.

They were running hard in mankind's go-go ratrace before they decided four and a half years ago to pull out. Then they lived six months in an Army tent in the wilderness while they cut logs and gathered stones and built their rugged home.

You get there by bouncing a four-wheel drive vehicle miles up the mountain, twisting, turning, splashing through deep mudholes, swishing through a mere tunnel boring into the forest, passing a neatly lettered slab sign on a tree at the N.C.-Tennessee state line admonishing, "Keep Locust Gap Clean and Green."

There is a huge, organic garden below the dwelling, loaded with everything from luscious strawberries to zucchini squash. A baby's playpen sits in one edge of the rocky field.

You clomp onto the sweeping plank porch, rap on the heavy door, amble in and settle by the hot fireplace. Gaze at the orange flames licking the logs. Feel the crackling fire singe your face and bake your legs. Let your eyes soak up the raw beauty of roughhewn, hand-rubbed furniture, great balls of brown and orange and red woolen yarn, Robin's sumptuously designed and painstakingly looped rugs, the solid floor and log rafters.

There is no telephone. No television. No radio.

No newspaper. No communications with the world beyond without leaving the mountain.

But one huge wall is jammed with hundreds of books. There is a small desk with a typewriter. And scattered children's books.

Al sits on the floor, then on a chair, pulling Baby Laurel back and forth in an old cardboard box. Laurel, one and a half, pixie face framed in blonde curls, squeals and laughs. Already she has learned to laugh a lot.

Al is 32, about six feet, lanky, hard-muscled and still a good athlete. He grew up in flat Indian Rocks, Florida, was the gutsy captain of the Florida State University football team, took a Master's degree in biology in 1961, served in the Peace Corps in Nigeria and worked three years for the Southern Regional Council in Atlanta.

He has short, chestnut hair and a thick mustache, wears jeans and a grimy tee-shirt in which he's been laying stone all day, now his favorite kind of work. He hangs loose, a free-thinker and free-speaker with a fast, incisive wit.

Within minutes, Robin has whipped up a fantastic meal she serves with fresh-brewed tea in handmade stoneware. She is 30, willowy in a plain mini-dress, with a quick, large smile and strikingly expressive eyes and short, black hair. She is very energetic.

The daughter of a Michigan educator, she got her Master's degree in African and Latin American history, met Al in Nigeria with the Peace Corps, taught school in Atlanta and discovered in herself a creative flair for mountain craftsmanship and cookery.

After dinner, woozy with good food and drink, you get into a hotly competitive basketball game. Al has leveled off a big square down by the garden and put up a goal on an oak tree. You play until it's so dark you can't see the backboard, then climb to the house.

You all sprawl on the porch, leaning against the mortar-chinked logs, feeling the chilly evening breeze on your hot, sweaty faces, gazing silently at the black-silhouetted humps of the Appalachians against the starry, indigo cyclorama of the night sky.

It is simple. Good. So good to be alive and quivering and smelling and feeling and thinking as clearly as the twinkling heavens. You just savor it a long while, scanning this ethereal world, looking out across North Carolina and Tennessee and northward to Virginia. Then you talk.

You wonder, all around the direct question, what impels two such people as Al and Robin to cut loose from society and drastically modify their lifestyles. Some do, but they rarely last so long. There is a horde of tired and bored humanity, you suspect, who openly or secretly yearn for this kind of unfettered simplicity and peace.

But the Ulmers are far beyond rationalizing and talking. Finally, Al casts his life history in five words:

"Educated, dedicated, jaded—and here," he says, shrugging.

This is peace

THE "LITTLE WAR:" CHEROKEE INDIAN STICKBALL GAME

The term "Southen Appalachian mountaineer" usually evokes a mental image of the stalwart white pioneers of British stock, English, Scotch and Irish. But the first "Southern Appalachian mountaineers" were Cherokee Indians. Now their vast territory is reduced to a North Carolina tract called the Qualla Boundary in the Great Smokey Mountains, but their cultural influence is still felt by their white neighbors. And the Cherokee Indians of the Eastern Band, in turn, have been strongly influenced by the encroaching white man's culture. This story focuses on one great Cherokee tradition that is now little more than a fading memory.

Big Jeff Toineeta, 55, a massive man with the powerful shoulders of a bear, was one of the great, feared players of the body-battering native Cherokee game called "anetsa," generally known as Indian stickball.

It was an hour before the big stickball game, and Big Jeff stood like a great sphinx in his overalls and billed black cap by the high school athletic field fence, glancing toward an ominous raincloud to the west, squinting toward the bright eastern sky, remembering days of glory and pain on bygone playing fields. "I used to wear eagle's feather (a sacred object). They said those who wore it really was a man. You never on the ground if you wore the eagle's feather. Now, no eagle's feather," he said in the gutteral accent heavily influenced by his native tongue.

"Boy, it was rough. I remember I broke the bones of my foot one time, but they needed me and I had to go on and play anyway," he said, wincing. Another time, so many players had been carried off the field that only two were left, so he had to do combat three hours before grasping victory.

Now Big Jeff is in charge of arranging stickball games for each day of the annual Cherokee Fall Festival in late September.

Standing with him was festival manager Newman Arneach, who explained how the roughhouse game is played and some of the discontinued customs which once embellished the "little war's" spirit. Arneach himself once cracked a collarbone and had a shoulder smashed out of place.

The game, once imbued with great importance and even mystical overtones, used to be played with all-out viciousness between the seven tribal clans of the Cherokee nation. Its results could settle disputes, win or lose high betting stakes and so on.

As the stone bleachers filled with mostly white spectators, last of the medicine men Amoneeta Sequoyah, 71, who would act as a sort of referee for the game, cocked his black cowboy hat forward over

his long, raven-black hair and recalled still other details and interpretations of decades past.

Teams would train as much as a month or six weeks for a big game, during which time it was forbidden to touch a woman. On the eve of the game, they would begin the long march to Cherokee, camping overnight, singing and dancing throughout the night. A medicine man would scratch their bodies with briars, rattlesnake teeth or other sharp objects until they bled, then rub a stinging compound of herbs into the wounds.

Food was forbidden until after the game, when the combatants would plunge into the cold waters of the Occonoluftee River, then be brought good things to eat by the women. During the game, the players wore only breech-clouts held by a leather thong. Now they wear shorts or bathing trunks.

And now it was 3 p.m. The exhibition game began, Sequoyah making comments from the center of the 300-foot field, the two teams of 10 men each shouting challenges in Cherokee as they alternately advanced to the center ground. The South team flung their 18-inch sticks of hickory, tipped with small mesh ball cups, into a line. North men chose their opponents by matching sticks.

Sequoyah chattered instructions in Cherokee, tossed the small red ball into the air and exhorted the players as seemingly disorganized mayhem broke out. Players with such family names as Bigwitch, Cucumber, Toineeta, Blackfox, Littlejohn, Reed, Bowman and Walkingstick grappled for the ball as a steady drizzle soaked and slickened the turf.

The object was to get the ball through the opponents' "goalposts"—green branches stuck into the ground at each end of the field—with the first to score 12 times declared the winner, regardless of time.

Almost no rules apply. Biting, hitting, holding, gouging and scratching are accepted methods of competition. There are no time-outs and no substitutions. If a man is knocked out of the game, his opponent also must drop out.

South scored first, then soon soared ahead nine to two. North, admonished by the spry medicine man, surged back with four straight goals. An Indian by-stander grinned. He interpreted Sequoyah's admonishments as meaning "about the same as get the lead out."

Slam-bam. Crunch. Whomp. Sweat-slick bodies battled, turned red with scratches, stinging blows and writhing on the ground. Soon four players were sidelined. Finally, South triumphed twelve to seven.

Sometimes two opponents' tempers flared, igniting personal battles apart from the main action. And when the game ended, several continued wrestling.

Shuffling from the field, the medicine man grinned broadly and said, "The way I feel now, I feel just as good as when I was twenty years old, I enjoyed that game more than any of them did...."

THE DANIEL BOONE WAGON TRAIN

"Heee-yaarrrh! Git along there, ye lazy critters."

The lusty, deep-throated cry echoes over the lush meadow and meandering creek where State Farm Road branches off Deerfield Road near Boone, North Carolina, drowning the axle squeaks of about 80 wagons and clattering hoofs of hundreds of horses in the famed Daniel Boone Wagon Train.

The richly tanned, bull-necked man whacks the reins across the sweating rumps of his barrel-chested team of tired, plodding horses, and they bolt momentarily. Whipping off his cowboy-style straw hat, the big man wipes a calloused hand across the sweat-filled creases of his brow through his damp, matted hair.

"Heeee-yaarrh!" he yells again, and the flowery-frocked children in the wagon behind him grin in delight.

The sun blazes high overhead. It's a little after noon Friday and the hot, exhausted travelers are all smiling and laughing and chattering and urging their animals on for the last hundred yards of the 48-mile trek up the Appalachian mountains from North Wilkesboro.

The long, jostling train of buckboards, prairie schooners and horseback riders rattles off the paved road and loops around the big field of Optimist Park. Menfolk and their women and young'uns spill off the wagons and begin making their last camp, the men unyoking the horses and the women scurrying to the cool creek for buckets of water and the young'uns wading and splashing.

One little scutter, shucking his cowboy boots, dips into the creek with his straw hat for a drink—like the old-timers do in the movies. Only the hat keeps leaking. And he looks around sheepishly to see if anyone has noticed.

Two men from Walnut Cove, one of them an ancient with a well-worn cane, pull a spring truck seat from their wagon, then sit placidly in the shade of the white muslin wagon cover. Like most of the wagons, theirs is freshly painted red and green and cared for so lovingly that it looks like it just came out of the wagon factory.

It's a long haul up the stubborn mountain the

way Daniel Boone climbed in 1775 on his way to Kentucky. The eager riders, from all over the mountains and foothills and mingled with some from as far away as New Jersey and New York, had paraded through North Wilkesboro, then rolled out of the picturesque Yadkin Valley Tuesday morning along N.C. 268 on their way to Ferguson, 15 miles away.

Near Ferguson, they passed Boone's old homeplace, the home he left to make his mark as a frontiersman nearly 200 years ago. This annual trek, now a decade old, commemorates that first restless climb to see what was in the mountains and beyond.

After heaps of barbecued chicken and square dancing and a sound sleep, the wagon train pulled out of the muddy campsite Wednesday morning for little Darby, winding along a small road skirting Elk Creek.

At Darby, more barbecued chickens, about 1,300 of them, awaited the famished travelers. And more old-time fiddling and stomping. And swimming in the wide hole in Elks Creek.

Thursday morning, they pushed on for Triplett, nestled in a pastoral valley between steep mountain ridges that tower up to the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was a blistering day, and dust filled their nostrils and caked their faces from the crooked, powder-dry roadbed. Sweat trickled into the 10-year-old growth of beard on Adam Lambe, a flatlander from down at Burlington, North Carolina.

Friday morning the horses jerked in their harness and began the hardest pull, up the steep mountain into Boone. The day was scorching, and lathered animals strained and snorted and quivered as they leaned into the climb.

Now, Friday evening, a cloud-splotched sky cools the weary wayfarers although it is still a little muggy. A late, pink-orange sun glimmers in the west, tinting the white tops of the wagons in Optimist Park. A few campfires are lit, emitting hickory-smelling smoke which blends with the pungent odors of sweaty horses.

Swarms of local mountain folks pour into the field among the wagons, leaving hundreds of cars parked across the road. Deputies and white-coveralled Deep Creek Volunteer Fire Department men help direct the noisy, bumper-to-bumper traffic. Many camper trucks pull in among the wagons for the night.

They fill the cool night air of Watauga County with mountain fiddling and songs and shouts and laughter long after midnight, this last night before the big parade through downtown Boone the next morning.

It's the last fling, a fitting tribute to the unfetfetered spirit of the pioneering man they commemorate.

DR. CRATIS WILLIAMS: A LAMENT FOR APPALACHIA

"The old-time Southern Appalachian mountaineers are rapidly disappearing," said bearded Dr. Cratis Williams across a plate of chicken and dumplings at the Tar Heel Restaurant in Boone, North Carolina.

It was not the matter-of-fact, scholarly sort of statement of a man in the autumn of his life who has a Ph.D. degree in English from New York University and who has been dean of the graduate school at Appalachian State University since 1958.

It was more like a soft-spoken lament, a glance back over the shoulder at the rugged backwoods farm on the Big Sandy in eastern Kentucky where he grew up. The tone evoked visions of a life-style in which Williams had learned to see value.

"They had unique ways of saying things," Williams was saying. "It glittered and sparkled with colorful language of all kinds. It was rich in metaphor.

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"And yet, nowhere in the English-speaking world have 13 million people been made to feel so ashamed of their speech.

"Speech represented the humor with which they considered life. They were skilled story-tellers. They depended on the oral tradition. They keep alive, even today, a pretty respectable art of story-telling...."

Strolling jauntily in the crisp springtime air, headed back to the Appalachian State campus, this small man with the giant mind began casting spells himself with several uproarious yarns, because he has retained that scarce skill of the consummate raconteur.

His stories were not meant to impress his listener with those yarn-spinning abilities, though, but were to illustrate what great mastery his lusty grandfather had achieved with that "glittering" oral tradition. The trouble is, the stories cannot be passed on in print for posterity because Williams' grandfather had a way of delivering the most inspired verbal fireworks in some of the most explicit terms, wilting the hysterical listener into a limp pile of worn-out willow switches.

Williams, a nationally known authority on the Appalachian mountaineer's heritage, has written on everything from balladry to moonshining, and his role as educator has ranged from one-room schoolhouses in the Kentucky mountains to guiding the graduate school of a huge state university. He's also popular as an entertainer and lecturer, exciting listeners from New York to Florida.

Once, at a dinner during the Sixth Annual Bascom Lamar Lunsford Mountain Music Festival at Mars Hill College, Dr. John Hough, Mars Hill's assistant dean for academic affairs, was chatting with Williams. Then he turned aside and said: "If anyone I've ever known could fit the title, Dr. Williams is it—he's 'Mister Appalachia.'"

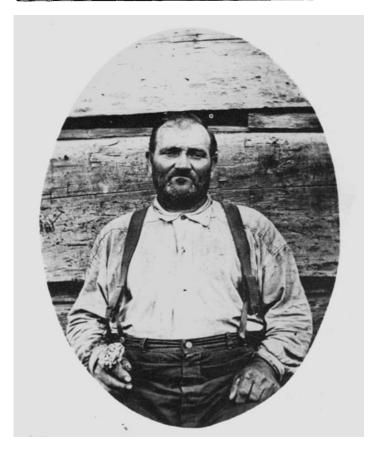
On the Appalachian State campus, back in Williams' walnut-furnished office, the sprightly mentor discussed the traditional mountaineer's lifestyle, the "seemingly leisurely pace" and untrammeled independence, the "technique of enjoying time for itself" and the relative serenity.

"I suspect that's why tourism is flourishing in the mountains," he said, "why the land is being bought up by fast-buck developers and sold to people in urban areas who dream of the time that they can recapture the simple life.

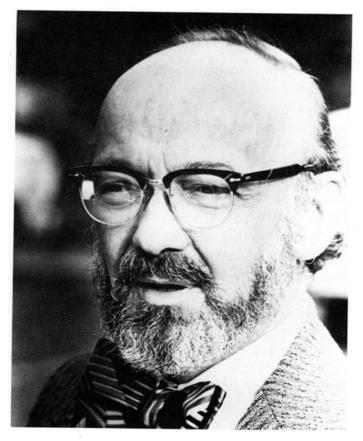
"Of course, they are being moved into what amounts to an urban situation in the mountains. But this yearning, I think, is part of their motivating desire. To escape the rat race of urbanism, to recapture what they think they see when they drive down a mountain road."

A paradox is that while hordes of city folks are seeking that simple, rustic life in the mountains, a lot of mountain youth are almost desperately trying to escape from it. Hill-country out-migration has been a reality for generations now.

"One important thing I think the Appalachian



Grandfather David Williams



Dr. Cratis Williams

Consortium is dedicated to: our young people, obviously, are the guardians of our future, and they themselves are halfway caught up in the traditions that make some feel they have to escape from it.

"For a long time the educational effort of the mountains was dedicated almost solely to shaming mountain folk out of their backgrounds and to preparing them for middle-class American life. Of course, I belonged to that generation too, until I began to understand what was there, to love it. The more I learned, the more pleased I was with who I am," Williams said, smiling gently.

"We're over that now. We have accepted the idea of pluralistic education. And we're far enough away from the poverty and isolation and the evils that went with it—along with all the glorious things—that if we dedicate some effort to it we can convince our young people that they have nothing to be ashamed of. That, instead, they have much to be proud of.

"And they can operate with a different kind of confidence; they can see themselves in the mountain tradition rather than aspirants to a middle-class social position. Allowing, at the same time, that the texture of their lives will be changed, that they'll have running water and electric cookstoves in their homes.

"At the same time, the traditional things that were of value, that were good, they can hold to because they know who they are, they love their tradition and they're happy to live within it."



Photographic Selections from *Down to Earth* -People of Appalachia, by Kenneth Murray

KENNETH MURRAY

Kenneth Murray is the thirty-year-old author-photographer of *Down to Earth—People of Appalachia*. The photographs in the book and the selections included here represent his concern with the sociological problems of the region which are reflected in the faces of these natural, honest and proud people.

A serious photo-journalist, born and raised near Chattanooga, Kenneth Murray has produced a sensitive pictorial essay of an important part of the Appalachian region devoid of stereotypes or sentimentality. The book is available through local booksellers or may be ordered for \$2.95 directly from the Appalachian Consortium Press, Boone, North Carolina 28607.



Country Store, Hancock County, Tennessee



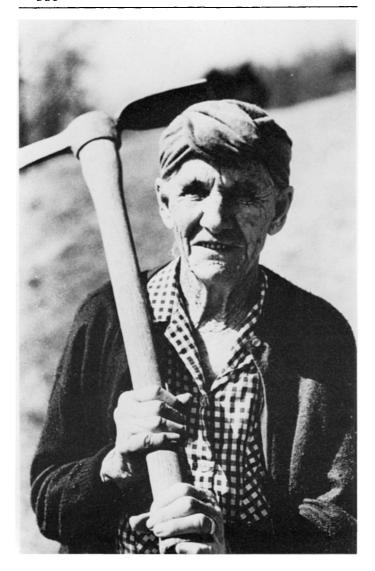
Mrs. Ida Stacy



Mamie Light, Hawkins County, Tennessee



Lee County, Virginia



Lee County, Virginia



Riding home atop a load of fodder in Scott County, Virginia

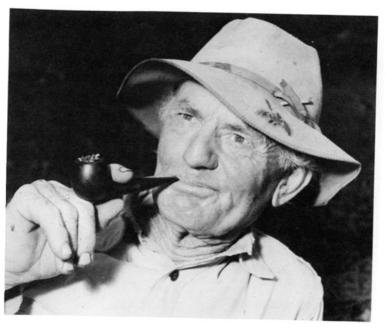


Photographic Selections from *Tennessee Hillfolk*, by Jesse Stuart and Joe Clark, H.B.S.S.

JOE CLARK, H.B.S.S. SELF-PORTRAIT

These photographs are from Tennessee Hill Folk, a delightful book of photographs by Joe Clark with text by Jesse Stuart. It is available at local booksellers or may be ordered for \$7.95 directly from Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, Tennessee 37235. Joe Clark is a hill county expatriate who took this series of pictures to cure his homesickness and to prove to his city friends in far-off Detroit that his oft told tales and descriptions were true. These Claiborne County pictures were chosen with a remarkable eye for detail, contrast and historical significance. They represent the range of social, family and work experiences in the Cumberland Gap country during the 1930's.

For everyone who grew up in Appalachia, these photographs serve as an exercise in nostalgia.



My Father, with a loaded pipe, home-grown tobacco, and a thoughtful mood



Mama and Aunt Nora Treece



Possum up a persimmon tree. Harry England and Otto Walker are about to shake Mr. Possum out



Peeling apples for apple butter



Beauty is where you find it



AFTERWORD

CRATIS WILLIAMS

For mainstream Americans, buffeted about by the atomic social conditions of the 1960's, tired from the strain of their struggle against the battering advances in technology and the beguiling growth of the Gross National Product, but still hopeful for what the future might bring of quiet peace, simple dignity, and relief from the enslavement of time clocks and tight schedules, "... a right good people" is a vacation trip to a far country in our own midst in which strong, independent people live simply as they hold to those values which relate to the integrity of the person and a respect for his uniqueness.

Harold Warren could not see his people in isolation. Around them are the beauty of the land, the mysterious vistas of the mountains and hills billowing into far horizons, the butter-colored sunrise, the lingering sunsets of mellow evening, and the crystal-clear air of mid-day. Close by are the ancient houses,

the trails along the water courses, and the make-do contrivances of resourceful folk who find joy in elemental struggles with the seasons which bring to the weather-tanned faces of older folk those lines and crinkles from among which peer the quietly smiling eyes of the mountaineer, eyes which hold one tentatively, friendly but shy and *almost* willing to communicate.

Mountain folk from Appalachia will be comfortable with "... a right good people." In it they will find refreshment, and the persons they will meet here will haunt them for recognition, remind them of kinspeople whom they have not seen recently, call them back home to "set a spell" and talk about whatever comes to mind, or just let the time whittle itself away while they rest their "weary bones" and say nothing at all if they "don't have a mind to".

Here, then, we have at long last a penetrating and insightful look at mountain folk captured both in wonderfully descriptive words that conjure up authentic pictures and in highly imaginative photographs that record the illusive but always present independent and proud spirit of "...a right good people".

Cratis Williams
Vice Chancellor for
Academic Affairs
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina
March, 1974

Designed by Spencer Qualls. Set in IBM Journal Roman by Westcott Computype, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. The paper is basis 60, Dependoweb Matte.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HAROLD F. WARREN was a native of Burke County, NC. He earned a B.A. in Philosophy from Berea College in 1957. He began as a featured writer for the *Charlotte Observer* in 1969 where he wrote many articles focused on the Western North Carolina region. He passed away on July 30, 2013 in Charlotte, NC.